HENRIETTA STACKPOLE IN THE REVISED VERSION OF *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*: DRAWING OUT THE MODERN FEMALE SELF

In the preface to the New York edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James apologizes for his "overtreatment" of Henrietta Stackpole. He emphasizes that "poor Miss Stackpole" is a "light ficelle," not a "true agent" in his "drama." James goes on to say that, in this novel, he "suffered Henrietta (of whom we have indubitably too much) so officiously, so almost inexplicably, to pervade" (N 14).[1] But what James terms "inexplicable" can be explained. We can account for Henrietta's "superabundance" if we first determine what Henrietta represents and what her role is in the novel. As Elise Miller points out "Henrietta is the symbol, albeit caricatured, of the ambitious woman of the future." Henrietta represents the independent and unconventional career woman, a new type of woman who combines qualities traditionally considered masculine with "feminine" traits. The novelty of the notion of the "new woman" at the time James conceived the character of Henrietta seems a legitimate justification for what the writer defines as his "excess of zeal" (N 115). For the readers of the 1881 edition, who were poorly acquainted with the type of woman that Henrietta represents, James needs to draw a clear picture. Henrietta's features must be clear-cut in order to avoid any misreadings, particularly when the reader is to see in her a model for the heroine of the novel to emulate. Accordingly, in the first version of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James painted a well-drawn portrait of Henrietta. But he must have considered the first portrait still obscure for, as F. O. Mathiessen rightly noted in his essay "The Painter's Sponge and Varnish Bottle," in the revised version of the novel James "brightened every inch" of his portrait of Henrietta.

In her essay "Revision and Thematic Change in *The Portrait of a Lady,"* Nina Baym summarizes the effect of the revisions concerning Henrietta as "the systematic vulgarization" of the character. She claims that in the 1908 version "the character is so belittled that the idea of Henrietta as a model is absurd" (192). Contrary to Baym's assertion, in the second portrait I see a Henrietta who has grown in stature. My purpose here is to illustrate how her features are emphasized and how she still remains a model figure in the revised version.

The reader hears about Henrietta for the first time in chapter 6 of the novel. In exposing Isabel's theory that she "was very fortunate in being independent," the narrator mentions that Isabel had a friend of whom "she always thought ... as a model." Isabel's friend and model, Henrietta Stackpole, is a young American journalist, who "without parents and without prop-

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[1] First editions of *The Portrait of A Lady* were separately published in England and America in 1881. This novel was included in the New York Edition of Henry James's writings in 1908. I quote from the Norton Critical edition of *The Portrait of A Lady* for the 1908 version and from *The Portrait of A Lady*: New York: Signet, 1963 for the earlier version. For unrevised fragments I cite page number from the Norton edition.

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erty, had adopted the children of an infirm and widowed sister and was paying their school-bills out of the proceeds of her literary labour" (N 55). This information is sufficient for the reader to form some ideas about Henrietta's character. That she is able to support herself and pay for her sister's children's education, indicates that Henrietta's occupation is not a mere hobby but a job to which she devotes full time and energy. The profession of journalism brings to our minds associations of assertiveness, publicity and professionalism. Assertiveness has been traditionally considered a masculine characteristic. Publicity was incompatible with the Victorian concept of modesty, a quality which defined a "lady." James's contemporaries could only associate professionalism with masculine experience. Professional women in general, and women journalists in particular, were so rare a phenomenon in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, that any reader of the time would surely have exclaimed with Ralph Touchett: "A female interviewer — a reporter in petticoats? I'm curious to see her" (N 79).

The reader awaits Henrietta's description as anxiously as Ralph awaits to see her. Ralph cannot imagine a woman who did not "care a straw what men think of her" to be anything but "very ugly" and "a kind of a monster" (N 79). But after his first encounter with her, Ralph must discard his preconceived notions, for Henrietta does not fit into the stereotype of the career woman of her time. "Miss Stackpole's gracious and comfortable aspect, ... hinted that it wouldn't [in the revised version "seemed to indicate that it would not"] be so easy as he had assumed to disapprove of her" (N 80). Thus, from the very beginning, Henrietta turns into a riddle difficult to read.

We would expect James's description of Henrietta, seen through Ralph's eyes, to provide a clue to what she represents. This is how Henrietta is introduced in the 1881 edition:

> Miss Stackpole, promptly descending, proved to be, as Isabel had said, decidedly pretty. She was a fair, plump person, of medium stature, with a round face, a small mouth, a delicate complexion, a bunch of light brown ringlets at the back of her head, and a peculiar open, surprised-looking eye ... She was very well dressed, in fresh, dove-coloured draperies, and Ralph saw at a glance that she was scrupulously, fastidiously neat. (S 77-78)

The revised version reads as follows:

> Miss Stackpole, promptly descending, proved, as Isabel had promised, quite delicately, even though rather provincially, fair. She was a neat, plump person, of a medium stature, with a round face, a small mouth, a delicate complexion, a bunch of light brown ringlets at the back of her head and a peculiarly open, surprised-looking eye ... She rustled, she shimmered, in fresh, dove-coloured draperies, and Ralph saw at a glance that she was as crisp and new and comprehensive as a first issue before the folding. (N 79-80)

Nina Baym rightly points out that "the point of the 1881 description is to demonstrate that Henrietta is not a stereotyped female journalist, unsexed and unkempt. She is pretty, decorous and ladylike." Basing her argument on the removal of the approving phrase "very well dressed" and "scrupulously, fastidiously neat" and the replacement of the latter phrase by "crisp and new and comprehensive as a first issue before the folding", Baym maintains that "the later images stress her modernity and brashness, turning her into a different cliche —the tough, efficient career girl." Baym interprets the revisions as the vulgarization of Henrietta. "Removing the element of softness and personal understatement of Henrietta's character James makes her loud, overbearing, and obnoxious", she says.

For those features of the second Henrietta that Baym interprets as "brash" and "loud" I offer a different reading. In the revised version James makes Henrietta more obviously "feminine" and, consequently, further removed from the stereotype of the tough career girl dressed in drab, functional clothes. The Henrietta of the later version calls more attention to her femininity. In the 1908 version, James brings Henrietta on stage with visual and acoustic effects. He employs two verbs—rustle and shimmer— that for his contemporary audience carried no negative connotations of brashness or loudness, but only suggested conspicuous femininity. "Rustle" brings to our minds the soft sound of skirts moving gently, "shimmer" suggests an image of gold embroidery shining with faint unsteady light or the reflections of light off delicate and traditionally feminine materials such as satin or silk. The New York Edition passage retains the idea of "neatness." The language of the later description is carefully chosen to emphasize that Henrietta's "gracious and comfortable aspect" corresponds to the traditional canons of feminine beauty. A "delicate complexion" is one of Henrietta's attributes in both portraits. In the later version James further emphasizes this idea of Henrietta's delicacy by offering as Ralph's first impression that "Miss Stackpole ... proved ... quite *delicately* [my emphasis] ...fair" (N 79). By accentuating Henrietta's "femininity", James is further emphasizing her modernity. Henrietta is past the phase in the history of feminism when women dressed in masculine attire. Transvestism or protest against male values is not the method that Henrietta selects to claim equality. Henrietta is ahead of her time. She claims her rights by asserting her femininity.

A multitude of revisions emphasize Henrietta's modernity. One revision that Nina Baym uses as evidence of Henrietta's vulgarization, will serve me as an example of how her modernity is accentuated in the later version. Discussing Henrietta's pecularities with Isabel, Ralph comments in the first version, "Henrietta, however, is fragrant —Henrietta is decidedly fragrant!" (S 87) In the 1908 version Ralph specifies the nature of Henrietta's fragrance: "Henrietta, however, does smell of the Future —it almost knocks you down!" (N 88) Though unaware of it, the later Ralph has solved the riddle. Henrietta is not a "monster" in woman's dress. She is a woman of the Future. If the image has lost its subtlety, as Baym points out, it has gained power. James eliminated any possible ambiguity as to what Henrietta represents. The later Henrietta is clearly the symbol of the new times.

Henrietta's attachment to the "New World" is a good indication of her modernity. She is an American in and out. In the 1881 version, Henrietta "reminds" Isabel of "the great democracy, the continent, the country, the nation, "but in the revised version "she vividly *figures* [my emphasis] it" (87). Once again the revision reveals Henrietta's symbolic stature. She symbolizes the country which continuously advances its frontier. Henrietta herself is advancing the frontier for woman's equality by establishing a new paradigm of woman.

Henrietta resembles a woman of our time. Without renouncing her femininity, she is also a capable professional. Furthermore, some of her "feminine" characteristics make of her a better professional. A sense of duty is both one defining quality of the "good" Victorian woman and a requirement for any good professional. Henrietta, Isabel tells us, "has a great sense of duty" (N 87). She demonstrates it both in her private and in her professional life. That Henrietta "had crossed the stormy ocean in midwinter because she had guessed that Isabel was sad" (N 406) is a good example of this admirable quality of hers, as it is that she takes care of the agonizing Ralph. As a journalist her duty is to find out the actual facts. Henrietta takes her obligation to a ridiculous extreme. Used to investigating, she continues doing her job in her private life. When "Ralph presented himself to her as an irritating problem," originally Henrietta thought that it would be "superficial on her part not to solve [the problem]" (S 81), but in the revised version this was a problem which "would be almost *immoral* [emphasis mine] not to work out" (N 83). The later version shows Henrietta's humane side at the same time that indicates that she follows a professional ethical code.

Henrietta's undeniable professional competence as a journalist is further emphasized by other revisions. The replacement of the epithet "enterprising" (S 77), which characterizes the young lady-correspondent, by "alert" (N 79) suggests that she is never unprepared, always paying full attention and ready to take down anything that might happen. "Enterprising" connotes activity, "alert" suggests "perceptiveness." Thus, Henrietta's femininity, not only her professionalism, are emphasized, for James considered perceptiveness a feminine characteristic.

Several other revisions add emphasis to Henrietta's perceptiveness. While in the earlier version "Miss Stackpole's brilliant eyes expanded still further" (S 85), in the revised version "Miss Stackpole's ocular surfaces unwinkingly caught the sun" (N 86). This alteration is a good example of James's masterly craft, for he achieves three different effects here. Primarily he emphasizes Henrietta's receptivity and, consequently, her femininity by describing her eyes as if they were some kind of sophisticated device to capture the light. In connecting her with technology, James also stresses Henrietta's modernity. In addition, the choice of the adverb "unwinkingly" suggests strength and bravery. But in Henrietta's gaze we are not to see masculine insensibility for another revision suggests that behind the surface of her unwinking eyes hides Henrietta's femininity. In the earlier version her eyes reminded Ralph of "large polished buttons." The image is expanded in the revision to "large polished buttons —buttons that might have fixed the elastic loops of some tense receptacle" (N 80). The later version is more clearly a fashion image. Henrietta's eyes resemble the polished or highly ornamented

buttons of a woman's dress or corset, that at the same time enclose and call attention to her most feminine attributes.

Henrietta's aggressive side, which her eyes symbolize, permits her to be a good professional. Even Ralph concedes that the profession requires some courage. "Interviewing requires bravery" (S 57) is how he originally puts it. The cynic note in Ralph's words in the later version, introduces an element of contempt for Henrietta's profession, but it also emphasizes the nerve and strength that is required. "Crimes of violence and attacks on the person require more or less pluck" (N 79), he says. After having known Henrietta for a few days, Ralph finally recognizes Henrietta's bravery as a positive quality: "as Isabel had said, she was brave." The approving phrase with which he completes his statement —"there is always something fine about that" (S 84)— is replaced by a powerful image that explains the full dimension of Henrietta's bravery: "she went into cages, she flourished lashes, like a spangled lion-tamer" (N 86). Thus, in the 1909 version, Henrietta becomes larger than life, almost a mythic figure.

But, in what exactly does Henrietta's bravery consist? Certainly in more than "interviewing people." Her persistent unconventionality is what is so admirable about her. In the Victorian society, the most conventional of societies, in which, as Mrs. Touchett says, "an unmarried ... isn't independent ... She is hampered at every step" (N 143), Henrietta knows no barriers. The young jornalist, a woman who consciously calls attention to her femininity, moves around "not caring a straw" (N 79) what men —or women— think of her. Her unconventionality is precisely the reason that Mr. Bantling gives for his liking her: "He liked Miss Stackpole extremely; he thought she had a wonderful head on her shoulders, and found great comfort in the society of a woman who was not perpetually thinking about what would be said and how it would look." The revision stresses Henrietta's nonconformist actitude by specifying that she does not follow the norms by which in Victorian society single women and men should stay in their separate worlds, performing only certain prescribed activities: "a woman who was not perpetually thinking about what would be said and how what she did, what *they* [Mr. Bantling and Henrietta] did —and they had done things!— would look" (N 241).

Henrietta's unconventionality arouses Mr. Bantling's curiosity. He wonders if she has any breach in her solid consistency, if she will ever fall apart. In the original version Mr. Bantling wants to see "if she ever *would* care" about appearances; he "was prepared to go as far as she" and "did not see why he should stop first" (S 260). In the revision "stop first" is replaced by "break down first" (N 241). The choice of the more polisemic term "break down" to replace "stop" is consistent with at least three categories of revisions in the text. The most obvious meaning of the verb in this context is "give in." Mr. Bantling interprets his adventures with Henrietta as a sort of competition. In the later version, Miss Stackpole "charmed him by the influence of a shining, *challenging* [my emphasis] eye" (N 189) ("with the spectacle of a brilliant eye" (S 202) in the 1881 version). There is an implied suggestion of a kind of duel. Henrietta has presented a challenge to a man in her private life as she has done in the professional world. These two revisions combined put a stronger emphasis on Henrietta's competitiveness and aggressiveness and, therefore, make her braver. James also highlights Henrietta's

strength when "break down" is read as physical or mental collapse. The new Henrietta "showed no signs of breaking down" (N 241) as opposed to the earlier version "show no signs of stopping at all" (260).

But if "break down" is read as "cease to function through fracture or dislocation of a part," as applied to a machine or a vehicle, the revision makes Henrietta machine-like and consequently, modern. In this sense the replacement is consistent with the new characterization of Henrietta as a woman of the future, related to the new means of transportation, which symbolize progress. The new Henrietta is "in the van of progress" (N 55) [replacing "was a great radical" (S 49)] and works "like a car conductor" (N 83) instead of "like a cotton mill" (S 82).

"Break down" is also a synonym for "decompose." One breaks down a complex chemical into smaller particles or a complicated syllogism into simpler parts. In this sense the new phrasing is coherent with two other revisions in the text. The first of these revisions occurs in the context of Ralph's effort to communicate with Henrietta, when after three days of knowing her, he concluded that "Her society had a less insoluble quality" (S 81). The revision reads "Her presence proved somehow less irreducible to soft particles" (N 83). Ralph discovers that Henrietta is not so inscrutable after all. Henrietta can be broken down, decomposed into her component parts. Even without quite understanding Henrietta's chemistry, Ralph recognizes some elements of hers to which he can relate.

Ralph's terminology tells us that James imagines Henrietta as a kind of complex chemical, an amalgam of different components. In second set of revision he further pursues this idea. Questioned about her future sister-in-law, the Henrietta of the 1881 version says "she's supposed to be a master mind. She thinks she knows everything: but she doesn't understand a lady-correspondent ... And she'll never understand —never!" (S 522). In the later version "lady-correspondent" is replaced by "a woman of my modern type" and the last of the sentences quoted reads: "And she'll never understand my mixture —never! (N 470)" This idea of Henrietta as a mysterious compound is still further reinforced by another addition. Henrietta says: "I really believe that's what he [Mr. Bantling] wants to marry me for —just to find out." The 1908 version is more specific: "just to find out the mystery and the proportions of it" (N 471).

This latter set of revisions reveals Henrietta's new self-awareness. The later Henrietta is fully aware of constituting a "mystery" for the others. Yet, she is not a mystery for herself. She knows the formula that makes up her own "mixture." Henrietta is conscious of belonging to a new type of woman, a more general category than that of lady-correspondent. It is precisely this self-awareness that makes Henrietta a modern woman.

But Henrietta always contradicts everyone's expectations. The woman who for Isabel was "chiefly a proof that a woman might suffice to herself and be happy" (N 55) is at the end going to get married. The most radical American patriot is going to give up her country. When Henrietta announces to Isabel that she is going to marry Mr. Bantling and "locate" in London, giving up her country, Isabel cries: "You've changed indeed!" Henrietta answers: "But I'm changed. A woman has to change a good deal in order to marry! (N 470). Henrietta's change

is more obvious in the revised version. She has adopted some of the ways of Mr. Bantling and the European or Europeanized people with whom she is acquainted now. Her alteration had begun very soon after Henrietta's first contact with Mr. Bantling, during the couple's visit to Paris. Originally, Isabel, noticing how Henrietta is adopting some of Mr. Bantling's views, fears that "she was indeed drifting toward those mysterious shallows" (S 202). In the revised version "mysterious shallows" is replaced by "abysses of sophistication" (N 189), thus reversing the direction of Henrietta's transformation. Henrietta is now increasingly more profound, not more superficial. More importantly, as a consequence of this revision, in the later version, an Isabel always concerned with personal freedom in heterosexual relationships does not see Mr. Bantling's influence as limiting of Henrietta's free movements. There is danger, Henrietta might fall in the open abysses, but she will not be "trapped" in the immobilizing shallows.

The clarification in the revised text that Henrietta's relationship with Mr. Bantling has a romantic character but does not prevent her from moving freely is important, for James presents Henrietta's relationship with the English gentleman in contrast to Isabel and Osmond's marriage, one in which the husband is the wife's "jailor." Henrietta's relationship with Mr. Bantling is more of a romance in the revised version. While originally Isabel thinks Mr. Bantling as "so kind," in the later version "she thought of him, extravagantly, as a beautiful, blameless knight" (N 467). For Henrietta, the originally "good Mr. Bantling" (S 203) is now "this perfect man of the world —a term that had ceased to make with her, as previously, for opprobrium" (N 189). Their "intimacy" is now "their personal intimacy."

Thus, Henrietta combines her writing career, which she has not given up, with a romantic relationship. Undoubtedly, James had the English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning in mind when he was sketching the portrait of Henrietta, for his character is going to marry her "knight" out of Wimpole Street too. That James hinted at some parallels with Elizabeth Barrett as opposed to a woman writer like George Sand is important for our appreciation of Henrietta's role in the novel. The French writer's personality and work fascinated James. In his review of Sand's autobiography (1877), James wrote: "There is something very liberal and universal in George Sand's genius, as well as masculine." He adds, "our final impression of her always is that she is a woman and a Frenchwoman" (cited in Corse 65). If in the previous fragment we replace Frenchwoman by American woman we obtain a valid description of Henrietta. Henrietta, like Sand, constitutes a case that proves that mental inherent distinctive features for men and women do not exist and that intellectual and physical power is not incompatible with "femininity." But admiring Sand's genius and personal courage as much as he did, James could not possibly make of her life style an alternative option to Isabel's. In a time-period when Victorian morality prevailed, if Henrietta's life style had been totally modelled after George Sand's, James's readers would not see in her a model figure for Isabel to emulate. But if Henrietta is another Elizabeth Barrett there is no question about her morality and about her marriage being a better one than Isabel's, the story of the Brownings "perfect" marriage being well known to James's reading public.

Perhaps in the question of Victorian morality lies the key to the correct interpretation of the replacement of "harmless confederates" by "groping celibates," terms in which Isabel thinks of Henrietta and her English friend. We should consider this replacement in conjunction with another revision that comes earlier in the text. Mrs. Touchett, having recently met Henrietta, gives her unfavorable opinion of the journalist to Isabel. Originally Mrs. Touchett defines Henrietta to Isabel as a "newspaper woman" (S 88). In the revised version she "had defined her as an adventuress and a bore —adventuress usually giving one more of a thrill" (N 88). The connotations of immoral sexual behavior that the word "adventuress" carries explain its "thrilling" effects. In labelling Henrietta as an "adventuress," Mrs. Touchett demonstrates her incapability to see beyond the stereotype of the independent woman of the time. When James replaces "harmless confederates" by "groping celibates" he clarifies for the reader that Henrietta's character does not correspond to the stereotype. She is not what the Victorians called an "experienced" woman. In that respect she is as much of a "lady" as Isabel is.

I must conclude by saying that in the later version of the novel James offers a clearer portrait of Henrietta, each of her characterizing features having been emphasized. Referring to his treatment of Henrietta, James wrote in the preface to the New York Edition: "So early was to begin my tendency to *overtreat*, rather than undertreat (when there was choice of danger) my subject. (Many members of my craft, I gather, are far from agreeing with me, but I have always held overtreating the minor *disservice* [emphasis mine])" (N 15). By emphasizing "disservice" I want to call attention to James's motivations for his almost compulsory revising habit. Henrietta and her creator share the same sense of duty. In Henrietta's words "I render her [Isabel] the service of drawing you [Ralph] out" (N 83) I hear an echo of James's voice in the preface to the New York Edition. Like Henrietta, James *must* clear up all dark corners. Henrietta was so clearly out of context in the world of *The Portrait of a Lady* that James must have had problems of conscience fearing that she would not be understood. Henrietta, a woman who combined masculine characteristics —assertiveness, courage, strength— and feminine traits —neatness, perceptiveness, sensitivity— constituted a riddle to the inhabitants of that world, a riddle that the revisions made easier for the readers of 1908 to solve.

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